

Proposed changes to the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL)

This document details the changes to the ASCL the ABS is proposing to make as an outcome of the current review. These changes include:

- A revised, four level hierarchy and code structure, based on language families, across the entire classification. In the proposed structure, the highest level of the classification is the Language family groups, characterised by a two-digit code. The second level of the classification is the Sub family group, characterised by a four-digit code. The third level of classification is the Narrow group, characterised by a six-digit code. The fourth and lowest level of the classification is Languages , characterised by an eight-digit code.
- The identification of new groups at all levels of the classification.
- The retirement of 18 Language groups to the appropriate 'not elsewhere classified' category.

These changes have been developed through consultation with stakeholders, analysis of 2011, 2016, and 2021 Census data, research and the [classification criteria](#). The objectives of these changes are to:

- more accurately reflect the languages spoken in the Australian community
- improve the usability of the classification
- streamline the coding structure
- better accommodate new groups, i.e. Language family groups, Sub family groups, Narrow groups and Language groups, over time.

The proposed new structure is provided in Appendix A. A concordance between the current and proposed new structure is provided in Appendix B. Both appendices are at the end of this document.

The changes the ABS is proposing to make to the ASCL are outlined below. No other changes are proposed at this time, though additional changes will be considered, following analysis of feedback collected through this round of public consultation.

Proposed New 2025 ASCL Structure

The ABS is proposing the following changes to the structure of the classification and the associated codes in the 2025 version of the ASCL:

1. Implementation of a four-level hierarchy across the entire classification. In the current (2016) ASCL, parts of Broad group 8 (Australian Indigenous Languages) have a four-level hierarchy (see Table 1), but the remainder of the classification has a three-level hierarchy. This proposed change would bring the rest of the classification in line with the grouping of languages in Broad group 8.

Table 1: Example of a group with a four-level hierarchy in the current (2016) ASCL

Code length	Hierarchical level	Example
1-digit	Broad group	8 Australian Indigenous Languages

2-digit	Narrow group (2 digit)	81 Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages
3-digit	Narrow group (3 digit)	817 Kunwinjku
4-digit	Language	8171 Gundjeihmi

2. To support this new four-level hierarchy, we propose to extend the code length (see Table 2). In the proposed new structure (see Table 2), Language family groups are the highest level of the classification and have two-digit codes. Sub family groups are the second level in the hierarchy and have four-digit codes. Narrow groups are the third level in the hierarchy and have six-digit codes. Language is the fourth and most detailed level of the classification and has eight-digit codes.

Table 2: Comparison of current (2016) and proposed (2025) structures for ASCL

ASCL 2016			Proposed ASCL 2025		
Code length	Hierarchical level	Example	Code length	Hierarchical level	Example
1-digit	Broad group	1 Northern European Languages	2-digit	Language family	13 Indo-European Languages
2-digit	Narrow group (2 digits)	11 Celtic	4-digit	Sub family group	1311 Celtic Languages
3-digit	Narrow group (3 digits)	n/a	6-digit	Narrow group	131111 Insular Languages
4-digit	Language	1101 Gaelic (Scotland)	8-digit	Language	13111111 Gaelic (Scotland)

3. In the proposed new structure, genetic affinity (the relationship between languages as a result of their evolution from a common ancestral language) is the primary criteria for aggregating languages into progressively broader categories. That is, Language group (the lowest level of the classification) that are most related to each other are grouped to create Narrow groups. Similarly, Narrow groups that are most closely related to each other are grouped into Sub family groups. Sub family groups were aggregated in the same way to create Language family groups (the highest level of the classification).

Within Sub family groups, Narrow groups are ordered by similarity of the location where the languages originated (geographic proximity). Within Narrow groups, Language groups have been organised alphabetically.

Genetic affinity is one of the existing criteria used in the ASCL to group similar languages together. However, **the primary use of this criterion to create groups**, particularly at the highest level of the classification, is a proposed change. In the current ASCL, Broad groups are created by aggregating

geographically proximate Narrow groups. The move to using genetic affinity throughout the classification enables:

- objectivity in where groups are placed within the classification
- alignment with the international language standard (ISO-639)
- alignment of the ASCL with language classifications used in other statistical organisations (Statistics Canada and Stats NZ), which are also based on genetic affinity

Key Proposed Changes, by 2016 ASCL Broad group

The following is a summary of the key proposed changes (new groups, retired groups and groups where the label has been updated) to Language groups in each of the 2016 ASCL Broad groups. Please note that under the proposed changes, all existing Language groups will be changed, in terms of their placement within the classification structure, and will be assigned a new, eight-digit code. Details of all the changes being proposed to the ASCL can be found in the Concordance between the 2016 and 2025 ASCL, in Appendix B below.

Broad group 1, Northern European Languages

One label changed:

- 1302 Letzeburgish updated to 13121116 Luxembourgish.

Broad group 2, Southern European Languages

No changes

Broad group 3, Eastern European Languages

One label changed:

- 3903 Aromunian (Macedo-Romanian) updated to 13131111 Aromanian.

Broad group 4, South West and Central Asian Languages

Two Language groups were added:

- 15111117 Syriac
- 13161114 Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji)

One Language group was retired:

- 4101 Kurdish moved to 13161199 Iranian Languages, nec

Two labels were updated:

- 4107 Hazaraghi updated to 13161113 Hazaragi
- 4305 Uyghur updated to 16121111 Uyghur

Broad group 5, Southern Asian Languages

One Language group was added:

- 13161216 Haryanvi

One Label was updated:

- 5217 Fijian Hindustani updated to 13161214 Fiji Hindi

Broad group 6, Southeast Asian Languages

Three Language groups were added:

- 23121111 Falam Chin
- 23121113 Siyin Chin
- 23121115 Mizo

One Language group was retired (6103, Karen) and replaced with the following three Language groups:

- 23121211 Karenni
- 23121212 Pwo Karen
- 23121213 S'gaw Karen

Five labels were updated:

- 6105 Zomi updated to 23121114 Tedim Chin
- 6102 Chin Haka updated to 23121112 Hakha Chin
- 6503 Ilokano updated to 27111211 Ilocano
- 6507 Tetum updated to 27111423 Tetun
- 6508 Timorese updated to 27111415 Meto

Broad group 7, Eastern Asian Languages

One label updated:

- 7101 Cantonese updated to Yue 23111115

Broad group 8, Australian Indigenous Languages

Forty-five Language groups (8-digit groups) have been created:

11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages

1111 Pama-Nyungan Languages

111111 Thura-Yura

- 11111112 Barngarla
- 11111115 Nukunu

111113 South West Languages, Coastal and Inland Ngayarta

- 11111313 Ngarla

111116 Other South West Languages

- 11111613 Thalandji

111118 Arandic Languages

- 11111812 Anmatyerr

111121 Yolngu Languages

- 11112111 Dhay'yi
- 11112112 Dhuwal
- 11112115 Djinang
- 11112117 Golpa
- 11112124 Yolngu Matha

111122 Tangic Languages

- 11112213 Ganggalidda

111124 Paman Languages

- 11112412 Kugu Nganhcara
- 11112418 Yir Yoront

111128 Maric Languages

- 11112811 Biri
- 11112813 Gunggari

- 11112814 Mandandanji
- 11112815 Yirendali
- 111131 Waka-Kabic Languages
 - 11113112 Kabi Kabi
 - 11113113 Wakka wakka
- 111132 Karnic Languages
 - 11113215 Kullilli
- 111133 Durubulic Languages
 - 11113311 Jandai
 - 11113312 Yuggera
- 111134 Gumbaynggaric Languages
 - 11113412 Yaygirr
- 111135 Wiradhuric Languages
 - 11113511 Bigambul
 - 11113513 Ngiyampaa
- 111136 Yuin-Kuric Languages
 - 11113611 Anaiwan
 - 11113612 Awabakal
 - 11113613 Darkinyung
 - 11113616 Dharug
 - 11113617 Dhurga
 - 11113618 Gathang (Birrbay/Worimi)
 - 11113621 Gundungurra/Gandangara
 - 11113622 Ngunawal
- 111137 Kulinic Languages
 - 11113713 Wemba wemba
 - 11113715 Woiwurrung
- 111199 Other Pama Nyungan Languages
 - 11119912 Kalkatungu/Kalkadoon
 - 11119914 Mununjali
- 1112 Nyulnyulan Languages
- 111211 Nyulnyulan Languages
 - 11121112 Jugun
- 1116 Mirndi Languages
- 111611 Mirndi Languages
 - 11161115 Wambayan
- 1117 Daly Languages
- 111712 Murrinh-Patha Languages
 - 11171212 Ngan'gi
- 1181 New and Contact Languages
- 118111 New and Contact Languages
 - 11811111 Cape York Creole

- 11811114 Lockhart River Creole
- 11811115 Ngukurr Kriol
- 11811117 Yarrie Lingo

1199 Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages

119911 Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages

- 11991116 palawa kani

Forty-three Languages (determined to be either alternative names, or variations of the same language), have been linked to another, existing group.

81 Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages

- 8113 Ngan'gikurunggurr linked to 11171212 Ngan'gi
- 8123 Gudjani linked to 11161115 Wambayan
- 8154 Wambaya linked to 11161115 Wambayan
- 8166 Marridan linked to 11171113 Marriithiyel
- 8182 Gun-nartpa linked to 11221111 Burarra

82 Yolngu Matha Languages

821 Dhangu Languages

- 8211 Galpu linked to 11112124 Yolngu Matha
- 8212 Golumala linked to 11112124 Yolngu Matha
- 8213 Wangurri linked to 11112124 Yolngu Matha

822 Dhay'yi Languages

- 8221 Dhalwangu linked to 11112111 Dhay'yi
- 8222 Djarrwark linked to 11112111 Dhay'yi

823 Dhuwal Languages

- 8232 Djapu linked to 11112112 Dhuwal
- 8233 Daatiwuy linked to 11112112 Dhuwal
- 8234 Marrangu linked to 11112112 Dhuwal
- 8235 Liyagalawumirr linked to 11112112 Dhuwal
- 8236 Liyagawumirr linked to 11112112 Dhuwal

824 Dhuwala Languages

- 8244 Guyamirrili linked to 11112121 Gupapuyngu
- 8246 Manggalili linked to 11112121 Gupapuyngu
- 8247 Wulbulkarra linked to 11112121 Gupapuyngu

825 Djinang Languages

- 8251 Wurlaki linked to 11112115 Djinang

826 Djinba Languages

- 8261 Ganalbingu linked to 11112116 Djinba
- 8263 Manyjalpingu linked to 11112116 Djinba

827 Yakuy Languages

- 8272 Wagilak linked to 11112122 Ritharrngu

828 Nhangu Languages

- 8281 Nhangu linked to 11112123 Yan-nhangu

829 Other Yolngu Matha Languages

- 8293 Madarrpa linked to 11112121 Gupapuyngu
- 8295 Rirratjingu linked to 11112124 Yolngu Matha
- 8292 Djangu linked to 11112124 Yolngu Matha
- 8294 Warramiri linked to 11112124 Yolngu Matha

83 Cape York Peninsula Languages

- 8306 Girramay linked to 11112711 Dyirbal
- 8312 Lamalama linked to 11112415 Morrobalama
- 8316 Kugu Muminh linked to 11112412 Kugu Nganhcara

85 Northern Desert Fringe Area Languages

- 8504 Bilinarra linked to 11111514 Ngarinyman
- 8511 Malngin linked to 11111511 Gurindji
- 8517 Wanyjirra linked to 11111511 Gurindji

86 Arandic Languages

- 8607 Antekerrepenh linked to 11111813 Arrernte
- 8611 Central Anmatyerr linked to 11111812 Anmatyerr
- 8612 Eastern Anmatyerr linked to 11111812 Anmatyerr

87 Western Desert Languages

- 8704 Kartujarra linked to 11111216 Martu Wangka

88 Kimberley Area Languages

- 8807 Worla linked to 11141111 Ngarinyin
- 8813 Gambera linked to 11141113 Wunambal
- 8814 Jawi linked to 11121111 Bardi

89 Other Australian Indigenous Languages

- 8914 Githabul linked to 11112311 Bandjalung
- 8946 Baanbay linked to 11113411 Gumbaynggir
- 8958 Ngatjumaya linked to 11111611 Mirniny

Twelve groups have been retired:

- 8144 Matngala moved to 11171999 Daly languages nec
- 8158 Kuwema moved to 11171999 Daly languages nec
- 8315 Alngith moved to 11112499 Paman languages, nec
- 8318 Thaynakwith moved to 11112499 Paman languages, nec
- 8321 Yuputhimri moved to 11112499 Paman languages, nec
- 8322 Tjungundji moved to 11112499 Paman languages, nec
- 8508 Light Warlpiri moved to 11811199 New and contact languages, nec
- 8514 Ngardi moved to 11111599 South West language, Northern Desert Fringe, nec
- 8948 Barababaraba moved to 11113799 Kulinic languages, nec
- 8951 Dadi Dadi moved to 11119999 Other Pama Nyungan languages, nec
- 8956 Ladji Ladji moved to 11113799 Kulinic languages, nec
- 8961 Warluwarra moved to 11119999 Other Pama Nyungan languages, nec

Nineteen labels were updated:

- 8114 Nunggubuyu updated to 11181213 Wubuy
- 8136 Larrakiya updated to 11991112 Larrakia

- 8141 Maringarr updated to 11171111 Mari Ngarr
- 8147 Na-kara updated to 11221113 Nakkara
- 8401 Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kalaw Lagaw Ya updated to 11119911 Kalaw Lagaw Ya
- 8621 Eastern Arrernte updated to 11111813 Arrernte
- 8705 Kukatha updated to 11111212 Kokatha
- 8722 Tjupany updated to 11111222 Tjupan
- 8901 Adnymathanha updated to 11111111 Adnyamathanha
- 8903 Bandjalang updated to 11112311 Bandjalung
- 8905 Batjala updated to 11113111 Butchulla
- 8908 Diyari updated to 11113213 Dieri
- 8913 Garuwali updated to 11113214 Karuwali
- 8916 Kanai updated to 11119913 Kurnai
- 8937 Palyku/Nyiyaparli updated to 11111316 Palyku
- 8935 Nyungar updated to 11111612 Noongar
- 8953 Djabwurrung updated to 11113711 Djab Wurrung
- 8957 Mirning updated to 11111611 Mirniny
- 8963 Wargamay updated to 11112712 Warrgamay

Broad group 9, Other Languages

Three Languages groups added:

- 17111114 Edo
- 17119912 Kissi
- 17121115 Mende

Four Language groups retired:

- 9254 Lumun (Kuku Lumun) moved to 17999999 Other Niger Congo Languages, nec
- 9261 Themne moved to 17119999, Other Atlantic Congo languages, nec
- 9403 Hawaiian English moved to 12111299 Other creoles, nec
- 9502 Kiwai moved to 91111199 Other Languages, nec

Five labels were updated:

- 9205 Mauritian Creole to 12111111 Morisyen
- 9257 Mann to 17121112 Maan
- 9302 Gilberese to 27111412 Kiribati
- 9303 Maori (Cook Island) to 27111413 Cook Islands Maori
- 9304 Maori (New Zealand) to 27111414 Māori (New Zealand)
- 9405 Solomon Islands Pijin to 12111214 Pijin

Supplementary codes

Seven Language groups were created from Supplementary codes:

- 0002 Non verbal so described was moved to 91991111 Non verbal, so described
- 0003 Swiss, so described moved to 13991198 Swiss, so described
- 0004 Cypriot, so described was moved to 91111112 Cypriot, so described
- 0006 French creole, nfd was moved to 12111198 French creole, so described
- 0007 Spanish creole, nfd was moved to 12119998 Spanish creoles, so described
- 0008 Portuguese creole, nfd was moved to 12119997 Portuguese creoles, so described

- 0009 Pidgin, nfd was moved to 12121198 Pidgin, so described

Appendix A: Proposed structure of ASCL 2025



Appendix B: Concordance between ASCL 2016 and the proposed ASCL 2025

